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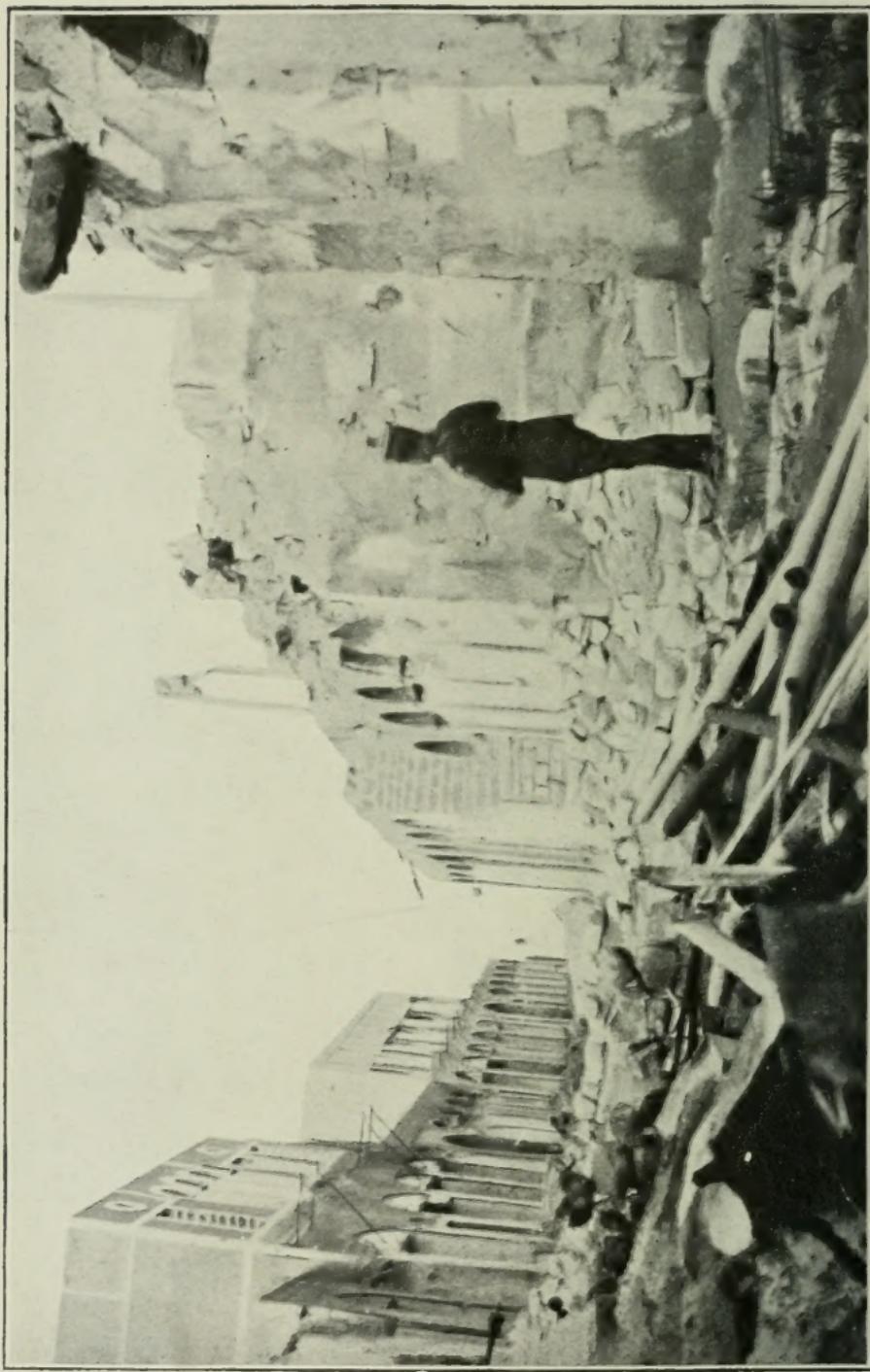
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STREET IN GAZA



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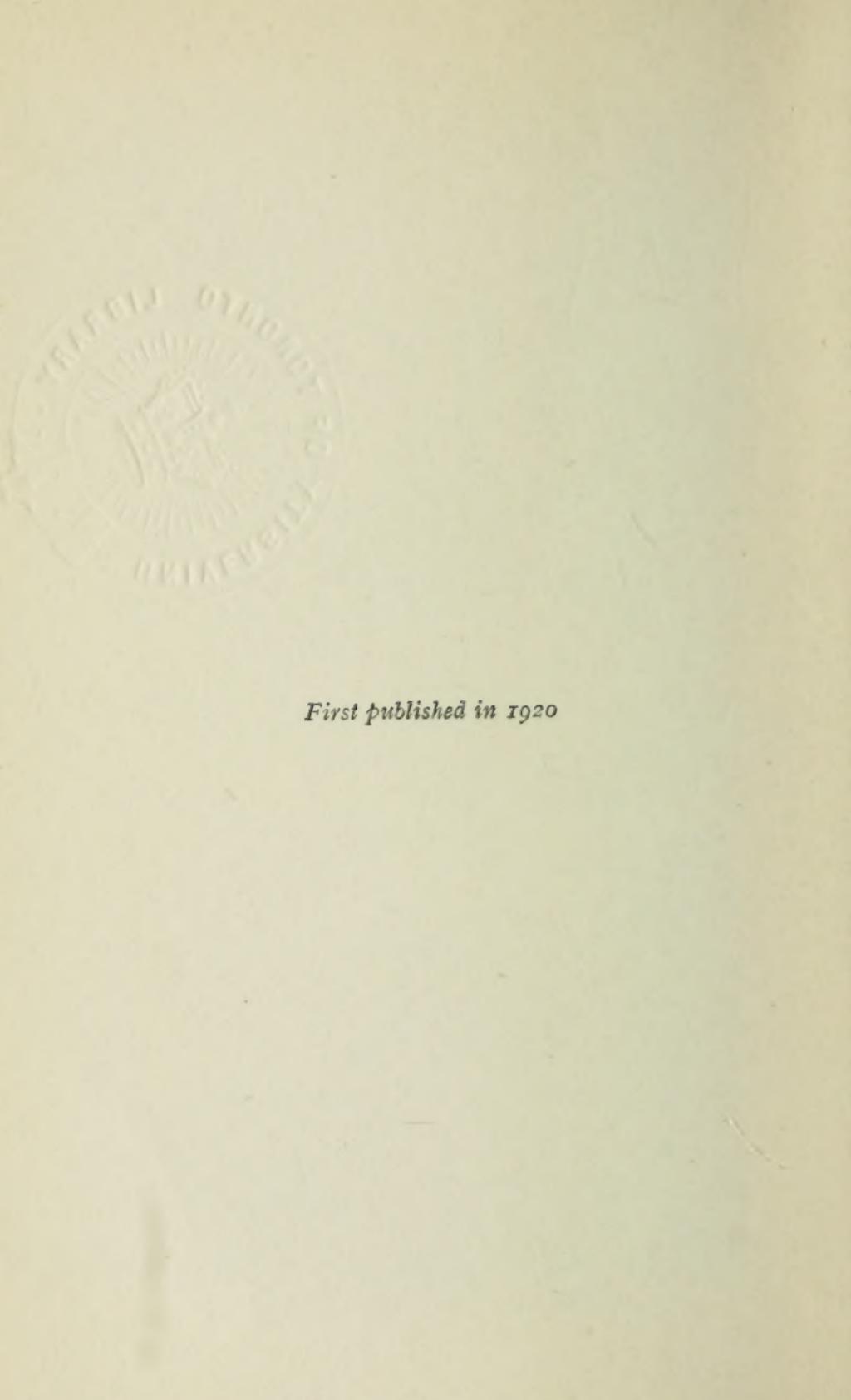
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INTRODUCTORY

INTRODUCTORY

GAZA

MOST visitors to the Holy Land have come in by Beyrouth or Jaffa. The present writer came in by El Arish and Gaza and walked nearly the whole distance among comrades whose favourite and most appropriate song was,

“ There’s a long long trail goes winding
To the Land of my Dreams.”

It was all desert, but a desert where the sand produced a healthy green scrub, and in spring grew myriads of flowers. From Rafa to Gaza it was plainly only desert for lack of human energy to turn it into fields.

El Arish is the border town of Egypt and the Wady el Arish is without doubt the “ River of Egypt ” mentioned in Genesis

xv. 18, as the western boundary of the inheritance promised to the seed of Abraham. Once across this wady, therefore, we were in that great, broad, undulating plain which had been allotted nominally to the tribe of Simeon, but was evidently much shared with the Amalekite. For this reason perhaps the country never prospered, for its cities were few. Yet we are told that at Gerar Isaac sowed and reaped a hundred-fold.

El Arish, rural and unpretentious, is but a posting town and probably in all ages escaped the ravages of war. Gaza, proud and defiant on its hill-top, is the real gate of Palestine, a gate before which great armies have thundered in vain. Any fool can recognise its strength. Attack from the south or west, and successive ranges of dunes bar your approach ; from the north or east, and a chain of intrenched scarps grin with ironical invitation. On all sides mazes of bristling cactus hedges give shelter to your enemy.

So for eight months this thorny-looking town, with minarets shooting up like needles among its close-packed houses, faced the rain of shells until to-day, as the visitor walks the street, he sees hardly a single dwelling-place has escaped the ruin, and in the lanes he climbs over piles of debris. For perhaps the tenth time in history the pride of Gaza is level with the dust.

Yet, as you walk up the battered streets, you find little excuse for sentimentality. No remains of fluted pillars, of delicately carved capitals, chiselled façades, or monuments of any sort lie about to reproach the victor. There is the great mosque with the roof fallen in, a fine building destitute of art, and we trod its floor ankle deep in empty cartridge-cases. The vicious hope that its sanctity would render it safe as a magazine had brought on it what seemed well-merited destruction. Elsewhere there is nothing to regret. All these jumbled, designless hovels will be the work of a few

days to re-establish. Gaza, it is plain, will soon be as it was, prosperous and unsightly, and humming with the jabber of ten thousand tongues.

From Gaza northward, even to Cæsarea and beyond, a sandy strip of desert varying from two to three miles in width borders the whole coast-line. The sandy belt is nowhere flat, but undulates with what appear to be successive and irregular ranges of dunes. Yet they are not dunes. Walk to the sea-shore from Gaza and you will find yourself among orchards from which the sand has been at least partially repelled. Everywhere beneath the sand you will find a rich loam in which fig-trees have taken root to bear abundant fruit. There are many who think that Palestine is being gradually claimed by the desert, and this evidently recent invasion of the sand goes some way to bear out the theory.

Contiguous and conterminous with the sandy belt lies the great plain of Sharon. Of this we had the first glimpse from the

top of Ali Muntar. After all we had read of it we were surprised at our easy ascent of this famous hill. Its height indeed is under 300 feet, and you would hardly shirk the climb on the hottest afternoon. But once on the top of it you soon recognise it to be the key of the fortress. And well our gunners knew it, for the whole surface was plastered with shell-holes. What had once been a grove of pines on the summit was completely blasted, yet all round great tufts of asphodel, that plant whose luxuriant green herbage gives birth to such a melancholy flower, gave promise of spring.

From here we saw below us great flocks of sheep feeding peacefully in pastures that might be taken for Sussex Downlands. Beyond stretched a wilderness in which we afterwards saw the elusive gazelle wandering undisturbed in groups of two or three. Beyond all, standing out brilliantly clear in this marvellous atmosphere, we descried the long range of the Judean hills.

This height of Ali Muntar, was according to tradition the "hill over against Hebron" up which Samson carried the gates of Gaza. To us it was the Pisgah from which we first viewed the Promised Land.

I

HEBRON

I

HEBRON

AUGUST is not the best time of year to undertake a walking tour in Palestine. A fierce sun has long since dried up the flower-strewn verdure of spring, and mankind in general postpones all activities until the coming of a cooler season. But holidays in war-time must be accepted when offered, or the chance missed. The chance came to us in August. We decided to perspire in Palestine rather than Cairo, and incidentally to do something worth perspiring for. Hence it was that this torrid month found us, a party of two officers, their servants, two *mukaris*, and two donkeys for their kit and provisions, setting out on foot in the time-honoured manner to explore

the by-ways of Southern Palestine and visit the homeland of Abraham.

We were warned that we should carry our lives in our hands ; the country was hardly conquered, stray bullets were still whistling about the wadies, and the neighbourhood of Hebron was exceptionally fanatical. But such amenities merely added a little spice to the adventure ; long marches had qualified us for the nomad life ; we were armed, and, for the rest, our fate was as Allah willed it.

The Holy Land between the sea and Jordan is divided into three distinct zones : Sharon, which is the coastal plain, the Shephelah, all rolling hills and dales, and the Uplands, a region of steep, stony hills and gorges. Ramleh is on the eastern edge of Sharon, in the midst of orange and almond plantations, one of the richest and pleasantest districts in Palestine. It was the base of Richard I's operations against Jerusalem and General Allenby's against the Turks. The town itself is mostly mud-

built, but the towers and minarets of its churches and mosques are good landmarks for many a mile in all directions.

Leaving this behind, we struck out of the great main road leading to Jerusalem and proceeded over a gently rising ground, extensively tilled, to that first bulwark of the Shephelah, the Tell el Gezer, the site of a fortress whose fame shades back into the dimmest epochs of history. Horam, the King of Gezer, was defeated by Joshua in the field, but, like Jebus and other strongholds, it never fell to his arms. Indeed, it never fell to Israelitish arms at all, and remained a possession of the Canaanites until stormed by Pharaoh and handed over to his son-in-law, King Solomon, as a wedding present.

Leaving our donkeys down by the little Arab village of Abu Shusheh, we climbed to the top of the hill. There are no ruins nor any trace of Gezer's ancient glory on the surface, but a deep shaft had been sunk which has revealed traces of its occupation

by man as far back as the Stone Age, and beyond Abu Shusheh on the side of an adjoining hill gaped the mouths of caves in which they had buried their dead. From a little tower of recent date we could see far over Sharon to the sea, and far to the north and south-east the retreating chain of Judean hills. It was difficult to realise how Ephraim (Judges i. 29), could have settled down with any feeling of security with the menace of this fortress continually in their view, or how David could have brooked such a stranger within the gates of his kingdom. Was it sentimentality? Was there some treaty, or was the place really too strong to be taken? Probably the latter. Thanks to Manasseh's fortifications, Jerusalem held out for three years against Nebuchadnezzar, and even then fell only to famine. Gezer was no doubt equally impregnable, and they must have been a weakly brood who yielded it so easily to Pharaoh.

Water must have been a serious problem

in some of these hill-capping towns, but in this respect Gezer had nothing to complain of. As we proceeded on our way down the valley we came to a splendid spring welling right up to the surface. Troops of army mules came from a camp miles distant and herds of native goats were all waiting their turn to be watered there.

Our way now took us along a hillside through a wilderness of stone and scrub, and, descending gradually to a lower level, we reached presently the village of Latron, now the transport base of the British army. That once behind us we felt that we had said good-bye to the war. For those five days not a rumour of its baleful happenings should reach us. We were to be Nature's guests.

We passed now up a lonely valley, the hill-sides on each side of us studded with grey stones and not a creature to be seen except the flies that played incessantly about us. Yet now and then to our right we descried a little patch of waving millet,

where some industrious fellahs had reclaimed from the wilderness a cultivable rood, and the faint sound of a pipe would sometimes reach us and tell us of some niche in the rocks where a goatherd sat, while his flock searched the scrub for wild thyme. After a long, gradual ascent the valley sloped down again and presently widened out into cultivated fields. A small native village came in sight embowered in foliage which turned out to be fig-trees, bearing quantities of fruit nearly ripe.

We were now close to the Jewish colony of Artuf, which, in spite of its position on the railway from Jaffa to Jerusalem, had flourished little. The railway comes up a broad valley from Sharon, and after Artuf disappears up a narrow gorge leading to Jerusalem. A very few scattered habitations and some small plantations were all that could be seen of the colony.

Halting only to refill our water-bottles and to water our donkeys—for we were now in noon-day heat—we crossed the line, and,

pushing over the hillside, were soon once more in the wilderness. Ahead of us, a white mansion conspicuous on a hill that towered above everything near it lured us from our direct route. Surely it was something interesting. At least it would afford us a patch of shade in which to enjoy our midday meal. Exceptionally there was no breeze this morning to relieve the scorch of the midday sun. Our track was strewn with loose stones, and once one of the donkeys stumbled and fell. What with the glare, the flies, and the heat, we now got fair warning of the trials we had undertaken. Presently the track dipped down to a little muddy stream, then up a long steep ascent, till we found ourselves at the gates of the white mansion.

Seen at close range its appearance was less imposing, and it turned out to be Beit Gemal, a monastery of the Salesian Brothers, an Italian order, of whom some half-dozen were in residence and kept a small school. We were warmly welcomed by the brother

told off for the purpose, and he talked to us in the engaging manner possessed by the best type of Syrian.

What, English officers walking? Where was our car? Where, anyhow, our horses? But—walking for pleasure? Not possible! And at this hot season! Why? Oh, why?

Our appearance, however, must have suggested that we were bona fide pedestrians, and pretty thirsty ones, for he led us at once into the guest-chamber, and grapes, figs, nuts, and excellent wine were at once set before us. He stayed with us and had so many questions to ask that it was some time before we could begin our own.

The war? No, they had not suffered much. Turkish officers had been quartered there, but no harm done. Life was much the same. They had a farm which produced what food they needed. But how they had missed English wares! How glad they were to see the English! How good everything English was!

We were pressed to stay the night, but time was too precious. Would we look round the building? Yes, gladly. There was not much to see. The rooms were spacious and lofty; in the main passage a well had been bored 200 feet into the earth. On the roof a magnificent view delighted us, carrying the eye far over burnt hills and thirsty valleys. We duly admired all, thanked our kind hosts, praised their work, left a dole for their poor, and set out on our way.

Ignoring the south-easterly and shorter route to Hebron, we now struck south in the direction of Beit Jibrin, and soon after leaving the monastery our track seemed to disappear altogether. We were paying the penalty of our detour and apparently in for a bad time. For some distance we struggled in a crag-strewn wady. At last a close study of the map suggested that if we crossed the ridge to our left we should regain our old route. The slope was steep, but we attacked it boldly. The *mukaris* needed

some help, but the donkeys behaved splendidly, and half-way up we struck a track. The rest was easy, and, gaining the ridge, we were more than gratified by the success of our manœuvre. There below us lay an immediate objective, the little village of Sacarieh; beyond it opened a new and charming tract of the Shephelah bathed in the soft afternoon light, and there, leading straight across the country and tapering away into the hills, lay the track we were seeking.

After a pleasant rest beneath a lone tree we descended the hill, and passing through Sacarieh, a typical Arab village, went on up the valley. Our track was smooth, broad, and regular, except where it dipped into a deep river-bed; on either side there were cultivated fields. We were soon past these, however, and ascended gradually into a wild moorland. Well away from the great highways and with the sun's power weakening, the labour of the march grew less and the charm of the wilderness grew greater.

The flies now went and dew began to fall imparting a fragrance to the still air. The twilight hour was at hand in which all the East rejoices. To the traveller it brings a sweet relief from the stress of the day, and in the mystery of the new scenery about him he sees visions which other men miss.

From such visions, however, we were presently startled by hearing, from a passing Arab, that Beit Jibrin was still one and a half hours distant, and reflecting that this would mean hunting for the well and making our bivouac in pitch darkness, or else camping without water, for our water-bottles were all well-nigh empty. We were hardly prepared to sacrifice our hopes of a wash and a long drink, and, though now thoroughly tired, pressed forward with renewed energy.

Fortune favoured us. Our road soon reached the climax of its long ascent and began to dip down, and the short hour of twilight was far spent when we espied, away to the left of us, a small Bedouin encampment. That told us that water could not

be far off. And, sure enough, another 200 yards brought us to a great stone-lipped well. Troughs hewn out of stone lay about it and the ground for at least 100 yards round was beaten hard and flat by the feet of God knows how many generations of camels and goats.

We chose a camping ground in the fold of a hill-side, and set busily to work in the failing light. The well was deep, and it needed all our rope to get the bucket to the water. A cheery fire, a good meal, a long drink, and a pipe ended a strenuous day, and we slept under the stars, far too tired to entertain the slightest apprehensions for our safety.

When we woke next morning white walls gleaming on a hill-top a mile distant showed us we were not far short of our last night's objective.

Beit Jibrin, the Mareshah of the Bible, was an important fortress from the days of Rehoboam onwards. The Mareshah of Rehoboam was, however, on a different site

about a mile distant. It was the home of the prophet Micah. Beit Jibrin was an important centre of Christianity, and rebuilt by the Crusaders. We approached the place through a beautiful park-like expanse dotted with olive-trees which seemed somehow to suggest nobler days than these. Presently we espied, to the left of us, the Tell el Merash, the site of Micah's city, and still occupied by a small village. Turning presently to the right through a lane of cactus hedges we were soon face to face with Beit Jibrin.

The place had a strange, amorphous look, stately ruins having been incorporated with the unsightly mud dwellings of the present inhabitants. A mediæval tower stood up boldly in the midst of the town, but more conspicuous was an immense mountain of refuse gradually piled up by generations of scavengers outside the entrance. Invaluable if only removed as manure to their fields, these noisome mounds are the curse of all Arab villages and a continual source of

stench, vermin, and disease. The size of Beit Jibrin's mound was appalling.

Entering the town and making for the tower, we presently turned a corner and found, sitting serenely in the shade of the Serai,¹ discussing coffee and cigarettes, a long row of the city elders. The sheik-el-bilad rose to bid us welcome and offer hospitality, but, aware that our dusty khaki-rigged figures were ill in keeping with this picturesque scene, we acknowledged the courtesy briefly and passed on.

Finding little of interest to admire, we remembered we had still to water up for the day, and made for the well. To our dismay we learned that the water lay about 150 feet deep and was only to be reached by a rope procurable in the town. This meant more delay than we could afford, and we decided to push on.

Our route now lay through Mareshah, and we hoped to find a well there. As we left Beit Jibrin we saw the mouths of caves

¹ Town hall.

yawning in the neighbouring hill-sides. As at Gezer, these had been used in ancient times for the burial of the dead, but many are made more elaborate, having been converted into dwelling places by the Edomites when, after the Captivity, they occupied Judea. It is practically certain, too, that the cave of Adullam to which David retreated when pursued by Saul was in this neighbourhood, for Micah (i. 15) mentions Adullam in the same breath as his native city.

As we approached the Tell el Mareshah it was impossible not to admire the fine, isolated site of the ancient fortress and to wonder why it had been changed for Beit Jibrin. We were shortly enlightened. Among some trees half-way up the hill we presently espied the stone facings of a well and made towards it. Alas ! a pebble dropped in resounded against a hard bottom. The well was dry. Going on to the village, we procured a small supply from a friendly villager, but learned that all he had was got from the well at Beit Jibrin.

We now descended into the Wady Merj, which was very similar to the Wady Sacarieh, with the same rock-studded hills on either side of us, and the first mile or so was through a cultivated area. It was the hottest hour of the day, namely 9 to 10 a.m. By that time the sun has gained almost its full strength and the air is quite still. It is only about 10 a.m., or later, that the *shemal*, the cool northerly wind, begins to blow, and then it will blow for the rest of the morning. This morning the heat seemed phenomenal. In compensation there was the smell of a kind of wild thyme that grows freely on the hill-sides of the Shephelah. This morning, due doubtless to the great heat, the air was full of it. The smell was like incense —a very proper savour, we thought, for the atmosphere of the Holy Land.

Still obsessed with vague fears about water in this arid district, we espied presently, feeding on the hill-side to the right of us, a flock of goats. This suggested water, and we struck off the track to look for it. Sure

enough, we came shortly to a small trickling stream which we followed and came in a few minutes to a beautiful clear pool. We were tempted to bathe, but it seemed rash in this sun, and we refrained.

In better heart we returned to our track, but the *shemal* still tarried and the midday heat seemed well-nigh intolerable. We looked in vain for a tree or a shady nook among the rocks. At last a big boulder up on our left appeared to throw a few square feet of shadow, and we made towards it. From this vantage, however, we despaired, two miles ahead of us, a whole grove of olive-trees. We at once returned to our road and covered uncomplainingly the intervening distance.

We discovered, on nearer approach, that our olive grove lay on the outskirts of the village of Terkumieh. We had, in fact, reached a point where the Shephelah merges in the Uplands of Judea, and behind the village a range of barren, stony ridges sloped away up to a farther range beyond.

We were tired after our hot walk, and decided, as it was a holiday stunt and not active service, that we would go no farther that day. The olive grove consisted of a number of small fields divided by low stone walls and in one of these, where there was good shade, we pitched our camp. The usual search for water had now to begin, and we were still out of luck, for the well turned out to be a mile from us, the other side of the village. A party, therefore, had to proceed thither. The way was extremely rough. The village appeared to be built on a great mass of rock thinly patched with earth, and great outcrops protruded all along the track. The village itself seemed more than usually squalid, but was full of urbane, well-dressed, and apparently leisured persons (doubtless their wives were working in the fields) who politely assisted us with our route. The well was in the next valley to that in which we were camped, and we found it better favoured and well cultivated. The well was deep, but water was being pumped

up in unstinted quantities, and the overflow went off down a channel to irrigate the neighbouring plantations.

We rested luxuriously all the afternoon, and in the social hour of sunset were visited by the owner of the plot on which we were camped. Unlike the well-attired men of leisure we had seen in the streets, his dress was simple and scanty, but there was that natural dignity about his person which one associates with honest labour and simple faith. Far from resenting our presence on his plot, he accosted us with an "El hamd lillah,"¹ and brought us offerings of figs and tomatoes. We gladly accepted them, and responded with cigarettes and sardines. Allah was again thanked, and he then sat down in our company. We were too tired to attempt conversation, but he was quite satisfied to sit there in silence. The Arab is fond of talking, but has none of that dread of silence so characteristic of western peoples.

Much refreshed by our long rest, we

¹ God be thanked.

started early next morning on the last stage of our journey to Hebron, now about nine miles distant. We soon found ourselves in a narrow gorge ascending steeply to a higher level of the country. In places the only track was a deep water-course formed by winter torrents, and the walk was for some time a scramble from rock to rock. Our donkeys again became a source of anxiety, but they won through without the slightest mishap. Half-way up the gorge a boy with a basketful of grapes sold us readily of his wares, which he had brought that morning from Hebron, and farther on a well of clear spring water among the rocks assuaged our thirst. Higher and yet higher we climbed, but were still enclosed by the steeps on either side of us. Then suddenly the track began to improve, and we emerged gradually into greenery and cultivation. One more climb on to a spur of moorland and we found ourselves in a land of pines. A collection of homesteads which we presently passed was named Beit Iskahil. It

suggested the Eschol of Numbers xiii. 23, from which Moses' spies took the grapes. Was it the same spot? Anyhow, we followed the example of the spies, and no finer grapes than these could be found in Palestine. Large, sweet, and luscious, they were now just ripe, and grew in vast profusion about us.

Resting for a few minutes under a tree, we now had a view that carried the eye far over the Shephelah into the dull green of Sharon, and even to the dunes by the sea-coast. Far away down to the right of us gleamed Beit Gemal on its hill-top, and beyond it the Tell el Gezer showed up conspicuous, but how dwarfed by the height from which we now looked!

We were now in Abraham's country, and as we proceeded on our way it was not difficult to understand his choice. Look where you would there was everywhere a cheerful display of green and a bright early morning look about all the scenery. There was, too, a delicious chill in the breeze

which robbed the midday sun of its baleful power. Water seemed abundant, and hill and valley alike seemed to bloom with luxuriant vegetation. We could well believe Abraham loved the land, but what mystified us now was why David, after seven years of residence, should abandon it for the far less favoured region of Jerusalem.

This, too, we were shortly to understand. Hebron itself was as yet invisible, and it was not until we had joined the Jerusalem road and began to descend a long hill that we caught the slightest glimpse of it. Pleasant suburban houses and gardens now apprised us that we approached the city, but a great hump of hill on our left still hid it from view. At last the road made a sharp bend to the left, and then, hoary and venerable, but homely and unpretentious, nestling between two hills and straggling half-way up both of them, utterly ineffective in its site, lay Hebron. No one who has viewed from the Mount of Olives the majesty of David's royal city, crowning so perfectly

the ridges of Zion, could on comparison fail to understand why Hebron did not come up either to the military requirements or the æsthetic ideals of Israel's greatest national hero. Unpretentious and indefensible, it was never meant to be more than the commercial centre of a prosperous district.

To us, however, it was a good place. Luxuries, which for three days we had been obliged to deny ourselves, were now available. A young Jew of Sabbatarian aspect in a swallow-tail coat and with corkscrew curls hanging about his ears, constituted himself our guide, and took us through the cool, winding streets. We pulled him up at the *suq*,¹ however, and made purchases for our larder. The place had a listless, mid-day look and prosperous-looking Moslems lounged in the stalls. An ill-mannered fellow would now and then spit as our guide passed him. To no place do the Arabs cling more passionately than Hebron, the

¹ Market.

home of Ishmael's father, and in numbers they are ten times more numerous than the Jews, whom they hate and despise.

We took the sights of Hebron for granted. We had lost time at Terkumieh, and must start back that afternoon to recover it. The cave of Macpelah, the oak of Mamre, the tomb of Abner—we saw none of them. But, after all, these things will wait. They will be shown for thousands of years; whereas there are many things in this country that will now soon pass away for ever. The glimpses of that life lived for so many thousands of years without a change—glimpses that give to the stories of the Bible, when re-read, such a new and vivid interest—it was these we could not afford to miss. So, returning to our camp, which by permission we had pitched in the shady garden of a hospital, we bathed, lunched, and slept out in the heat of the day, and by 4 o'clock were ascending the long hill out of Hebron in search of fresh wadies and new adventures.

Our return route took us for a few miles

along the Jerusalem road, a pleasant upland walk from which the ground to our left shelved off to lower levels and deep gorges, while higher elevations to our right screened off any possible view of the Jordan Valley. Presently the road dipped and we found ourselves at St. Philip's Well. St. Philip is supposed to have baptized the eunuch here, but it is only one of several likely places between Jerusalem and Gaza. Pious hands had built a chapel over the well, but this was now in ruins. We competed for the water along with pitcher-bearers from a large camp of black Bedouins which stood near. The chiselled features of the Arab and the dark skin of the negro are a remarkable and not unpleasant combination. There were good-looking faces among them.

Soon after leaving St. Philip's Well we struck off the main road by a track leading to Beit Ummar, and were soon again in a lonely region. Beit Ummar capped a lofty hill, and soon came in sight. Its appearance suggested the possibility of a monastery,

and, as night was now at hand, we had hopes of hospitality. Descending through some-time cultivated fields to the depths of a valley, we then climbed a steep hill-side. To our disappointment, Beit Ummar proved to be only an average Arab village without even a well. “Nuss saah,”¹ they replied to our inquiries, and showed us our route. It was, however, too dark to proceed farther, and we encamped on the edge of the moor. We had just sufficient water for the night, but there was not a stick to be found for our fire, and we had to burn the box which contained our stores.

Despite the elevation, the night was warm and still, and it was only towards dawn that we felt the chill of the highland air. Dawn was delicious, and the view that opened out as the mists rose was equal to any we had seen.

Starting early, and eager for our morning wash, we followed the track down off the moor, and after a half-mile plunged into a

¹ Half an hour.

deep gorge. Just as we had given up all hope of water we turned a corner, and, to our intense astonishment, found before us a smiling hamlet full of fig-trees—an oasis in the gorge! Water poured perennially out of a crevice in the rock, filled a pool, and irrigated strips of plantation in the narrow valley. Charming, picturesque, and utterly untypical, this hamlet was one of those delightful surprises that only befall treaders of unfrequented ways. They called it Shasta.

Regretting intensely that time did not permit us to linger, we congratulated the friendly folk who gathered round us on their delightful home, and, after satisfying our needs, passed down through little vineyards once more into the wilderness. We had said good-bye to the goodness of Hebron and were soon amidst the gloomiest desolation of the Shephelah. We came to Safa. Its only water supply was a cistern which caught the winter rain. As we left the village a dim-eyed, jaded young woman

struggled past us with a great skin on her back full of water from some distant well. Poor, over-driven Martha, some day now soon a young man will offer to carry your burden and your long spell of servitude will be broken !

We passed on threading our way over hillsides and now forcing a route through a trackless valley. Our maps guided us and at length, after crossing a sandy stretch of plain which could only be called desert, we came to the very spot we wanted, a fine shady terebinth for our midday camp, and a bow-shot from it a fine surface well.

While we lunched, flocks of goats arrived at the well and watered there. Presently some of the goatherds joined us under the tree and sat down sociably about us. In the wilderness all sense of shyness and social distinction vanish. Every man has a right to the society of all others, and all trade in news, wares, and friendly offices. One fellow made us a cheese out of the fresh goats' milk. He put the milk in a kind of

leather pouch which was squeezed and pommelled for about an hour and a half, resulting into a small white cake of cheese. Meanwhile a neat-figured lad in a white skull-cap and gallabeeah played his pipe, gazing all the while in envy at our boots. The ambition of his life was to possess a pair.

It was all very pleasant and pastoral and we willingly prolonged the hour. What was life here but a matter of flocks and wells and dreams and rambles on the hillside? All too soon we should return to that other!

Reluctantly we packed up once more and set out on the last stage of the day's march. We were now in a richer country and passed presently through Beit Nettif, prosperous and picturesque among its date-palms. From here to Beit Gemal was but a walk of a hundred minutes. There we were warmly welcomed back by the monks and given beds for the night. In the course of the evening we visited the students at

their supper. A little lad from Bethlehem told me his parents were at Acre. When would the British get there? This brought our minds back with a jolt to sterner things. Our holiday was over.

II

JORDAN VALLEY

II

JORDAN VALLEY

THE tract of country between Jerusalem and Jericho is one of the gloomiest in the Holy Land. A series of rocky, barren ridges slope abruptly down to the valley, being separated by deep stony gorges which, even if water is to be found there, are destitute of human habitation, having been indeed in all ages avoided by honest men and frequented by outlaws and foot-pads.

A walk through this melancholy region did not attract us. The tracks would have been difficult, the scenery entirely without charm. We were, therefore, content to be conveyed by motor the whole distance into the valley and begin our tramps there.

The journey was far from comfortable in spite of the efforts of army engineers upon the roads. For the limestone with which, in the absence of flints, all the roads in Palestine have to be metalled, is at best a poor material, and down these deep slopes the heavy daily traffic had made sad havoc of the surface.

Two miles from Jerusalem we were deep in a winding gorge which never opened out in front of us the slightest prospect. Down such a gorge doubtless it was that David fled from Absalom on Ziba's asses, while Shimei pursued along the ridge above and poured down curses and stones upon him.

Half-way down there was a break in the monotonous decline. The gorge suddenly ended in a valley running athwart the general trend of the landscape and the road took us up again half a mile of hill. At the top of this lay the reputed "Inn of the Good Samaritan." Before the war it had been a flourishing hostelry, now deserted and ruin-

ous, having in fact been badly battered by shells. Its early restoration is to be desired, for the twenty miles between Jerusalem and Jericho, if not done by car, is a dreary stretch.

We were soon deep in another gorge, and saw nothing more of interest until we were in the last few reaches. Then, through a gap to our right, we had a brief glimpse of a white-domed building which we were told was the Mosque of Nebi-Musa—the “Prophet Moses.” Not only have the Moslems a great respect for this patriarch, but they have recently discovered, contrary to the testimony of Scripture, that he was buried on the western side of Jordan. There is an annual pilgrimage to the tomb, of which more hereafter.

Another turn in the road and we beheld the “Mount of Temptation,” a formidable precipice with a drop of some 400 feet to the actual level of the Jordan Valley, at the top of which were perched a number of small white buildings where men pray. At the foot

of the precipice there is a beautiful garden which belongs to the monastery and is connected with it by a stairway up the cliffs.

Then at last the view opened before us—the Dead Sea, all blue and motionless to the right of us, in front a wilderness of sand and marl, to the left Jericho, insignificant, but set in a patch of pleasant green, the Jordan invisible but for a strip of blue at the mouth, and beyond Jordan the long chain of Moabite hills trailing away to the north. The general aspect of it all was gloomy and inhospitable; we had no occasion to stop the car and admire it, but now turned off the road and followed a rough and stony track that led to Dead Sea Post.

This post, situated by a shingly beach at the most northerly point of the lake, had been the principal base of the Turkish Dead Sea flotilla and consisted of a series of large huts and a small pier. A few trenches and a barbed wire entanglement constituted the

defences, but the place had been evacuated in haste, and the only damage done was the sinking, a few hundred yards from the shore, of a small gunboat. The vessel had, however, been recovered and was only awaiting the arrival of a few spare parts to be re-floated.

A trip on the lake was promised us for the morrow, so we passed the afternoon in a stroll to the mouth of Jordan. In spite of the dreariness of the landscape the walk did not lack interest. How long was it since the waters retreated from these sun-baked, but in some parts still aqueous clays? We found, some hundreds of yards inland, a stretch of gravel which suggested that at no distant period of the past this had been the shore of the sea. On the other hand, we knew that as recently as 1901 there existed, not far from this part of the coast, an island known as Rujm el Bahr, which was now covered with water, also that in 1848 this island had been a peninsula. Despite, therefore, the tangible evidence before us of

the rapid evaporation of the waters in recent times, it would appear that, during the last century at any rate, there had been a reaction, and the level of the sea has actually risen.

We had to follow an interior route in order to avoid a series of lagoons, and even so were frequently crossing a boggy patch of marl. As we approached the mouth of the river a feature was the enormous piles of driftwood that lay scattered about us, having been washed down by the river in the course of centuries to the sea and tossed up on to these flats by angry waves. So destitute of timber is most of Palestine that fuel had been brought from Egypt to supply the British army. Yet here was enough to supply millions.

The scene at the actual river mouth was not interesting. A well-behaved stream the Jordan keeps in its one channel almost to the last and throws the whole volume of its waters at once into the sea. But the region on each side of it is here a marshy

malarial wilderness, and we were glad to turn our backs on it.

Next morning we bathed in the sea. It was not a satisfactory experience. The impossibility of immersing the whole body makes swimming a difficult operation except on one's back. It refreshed, however, and a douche of spring water afterwards removed any sense of discomfort.

At noon we joined a geological excursion to the eastern shore of the sea, which we reached by means of a motor-launch. The sea was calm and the trip a very pleasant one. Incidentally, this means of navigation has to be confined to the northern half of the lake, as down at the southern end the salt is too thick for the screw to turn in it.

As we glided along it was interesting to compare the scenery on the opposite shores. The hills to the right of us retreated, arid, bleak, and forbidding, to the Judean highlands, whilst those to the left stood close up to the sea rugged and wild, but splashed

here and there with patches of green, mysterious and inviting. Wild boars, we heard, were to be found in this fascinating wilderness, and more than one had been actually bagged by the garrison of Dead Sea Post.

About two o'clock we ran in shore, and, disembarking on a rough jetty, at once commenced our explorations. The interior at this point was exceptionally accessible owing to the action of water, for here several small streams flowed into the sea. Between the streams rose plateaus of limestone backed by a confused jumble of mountain, precipice, and gorge. In some places a great needle of rock pointed up into the sky so shaped by centuries of chafing waters. We followed one of the streams, or rather its course, for the stream itself was hidden deep in an absolutely impenetrable barrier of vegetation. Determined to examine the water, we pursued it into a gorge where the vegetation ceased, and were greeted by the spectacle of water gushing from the rock all steaming

hot. This was no surprise, however, as we knew we were not far from the sulphur baths in which Herod had sought in vain for health.

We could get no farther here, for we were faced by a steep wall of rock and had to return to a more accessible point to continue our ramble. We clambered about amongst the limestone, now ascending a pinnacle for the view, and now hacking at the various species of rock encountered. There was little fossilisation in evidence, but here and there a yellow stain in the rock revealed the presence of oil. That this valuable product exists in the Dead Sea region is, however, no recent discovery. It is surmised, indeed, that Sodom and Gomorrah perished in the conflagration of a great oil-field.

We could have spent many hours wandering in this fascinating wilderness, but daylight began to fail, and we had to return. A delightful run back in the launch over a still sea in the sunset hour ended an interest-

ing day. The hills now faded into shadow, but as we neared home numerous camp-fires flashed out in the gloaming and told where the Arabs sat in soulful palaver over their evening meal.

Next morning found us on the march to Jericho to explore the Jordan Valley, having previously arranged for the conveyance of our kit by car. The distance is about five miles, and begins by a dreary stretch of desert, but we had only to go a few hundred yards to observe how the face of the desert could change under a little irrigation. About a mile from the post a brackish spring bubbles up and feeds a small reservoir which supplies bath water to the garrison. The vegetation about this little stream is a veritable jungle, and so thick, as I found in a subsequent ramble, as to be in some parts quite impenetrable.

Leaving this in our rear we pushed on over a sandy track. The sand was not unusually heavy, but the air was sultry and

one's feet felt like lead in this depressed region. At last we crossed a little irrigation channel running off merrily towards Jordan and soon after found ourselves among the olive and orange orchards of Jericho, and plantations which are the main source of Jerusalem's vegetable market. During the weeks when we had captured Jerusalem and halted, the Turks had tried to starve the city by holding Jericho, but now long trains of donkeys fared there daily, returning empty.

So remarkable is the productiveness of this small area that it is safe to prophesy for the Jordan Valley a prosperity equal to that of the Nile Delta, and with a much greater variety of products. The oranges of Jericho are the finest in Palestine, not excepting the world-famous fruit of Jaffa.

The site of Jericho has been changed at least three times in the course of history, and it is pretty certain the site of the present village (for it is no more) is not that of the

town through which our Lord passed. The tree climbed by Zacchæus is always shown to the visitor, but no one could look at it and affirm that it was more than 100 years old at most.

Jericho is small and insignificant, and there was nothing to keep us there. After some delay we were able to secure at the inn a couple of rather tired-looking donkeys and a *mukari* and set off towards the river. We were soon out of the cultivated area and moved over a flat, neglected, treeless plain which sloped down gently to the level of the river. After two hours of very monotonous going, the road led us into a maze of dunes composed entirely of marl. Formed evidently by the action of water in an earlier age when the whole valley was a great inland sea, they looked like huge barrows raised over the bones of countless dead. Half a mile of this dreariness, and, descending more abruptly, we reached a strip of green vegetation heavily strewn with driftwood, and there, bordered by a

thicket and shadowed by willows and poplars, flowed the famous river.

Not broader than the Ouse at Lewes, swift as the Wharfe at Ilkley, and muddy as the Nile, not straggling through morasses and flats, but flowing deep and strong between high banks, the Jordan is a noble river. Too swift for navigation, what wonders in water-power and what miracles in irrigation it offers a land that needs so much ! Crossing the bridge and settling down for lunch and rest in a shady nook, we indulged our desert-wearied senses in an hour of sylvan bliss. Pleasant indeed it was to listen to the deep murmur of the river and the rustling of the leaves—and forget those terrible dunes of marl.

Resuming our journey in the afternoon we pushed on beyond the bridgehead, now no longer of course in posture of defence, and found ourselves once more among dunes where the Turks had been entrenched—and where perhaps Elijah and Elisha had walked. Working up through these we

reached a plain similar to that we had traversed the other side of the river, but greener and pleasanter, a great heath of scrub-like verdure. As we advanced we came upon irrigation streams and patches of cultivation. We saw very little of the inhabitants, but an unmistakable sign of their presence about us was the sound of rifle-shots going off in all directions. There may have been sport, but the scantiness of animal life in the valley makes it improbable. Like a child with a new toy, we guessed that our friend the Arab was merely amusing himself with the firearms that the chances of war had put in his hands. The game is dangerous, and a bullet whistled uncomfortably near our heads ; but this risk has to be taken by anyone who explores a district under the new Arab administration.

Apart from this incident our afternoon trek was dull and monotonous. The pleasant hills ahead lured us on, but our approach to them seemed painfully slow, and twilight found us still plodding over the plain. At

last one of our donkeys threw itself down in the scrub and declined to get up. It was clearly time to bivouac, and we were fortunately now near the Wady es-Suweimah, a strong-flowing mountain brook that runs out into the north-east corner of the Dead Sea. This stream is probably the Bethjesimoth mentioned in Numbers xxxiii. 49, as the place where the Israelites camped previous to their invasion of Canaan. Here were a few trees, some bushes, fuel galore, and good fresh water. We soon found a favourable spot, kindled a cheerful fire, and settled down for the night. A Bedouin village was close at hand, but they took no notice of us, and we slept undisturbed.

We had hoped to proceed the following day as far as Heshbon, but the condition of our donkeys convinced us that this was impracticable. We discovered that, previously to their being hired by us, they had just performed the tedious journey to and from Jerusalem, and ought properly to have been given a day's rest. We, there-

fore, decided to leave them with our servants and the *mukari* and go on alone into the hills, returning at midday.

Following the stream, we arrived presently in a region of low foothills beyond which soared others in successive ranges till they became mountains. We were now probably near the sites of Sodom and the other "cities of the plain." Expert opinion used to place them at the south end of the Dead Sea, but it is impossible, after an intelligent reading of the whole story in Genesis, to believe that they were anywhere but in the plain of Jordan. The region at the south end of the Dead Sea is dreary and desolate and impossible to conceive of as affording sites for five prosperous and luxurious cities. Of the five cities we are told four perished and the fifth, Zoar, was spared for Lot to flee to. There was a well-known city called Zoar south of the Dead Sea, but Hebrew writers mention another at the north end which traded by water with Jericho. Lot took the hour between dawn and sunrise to

get from Sodom to Zoar (Genesis xix. 15-23). If Zoar was close to the sea Sodom might be where we were now walking. Again, we are told in Genesis xiv. that the cities of the plain were attacked by four kings from the north. The narrative distinctly states that, after a campaign in Mount Seir, Chedorlaomer and his allies took the "cities of the plain" on his return journey. Verse ten mentions slime-pits—which were presumably dug by the Sodomites to entrap the chariots and horses of the Syrians. Traces of such pits are still to be found a mile or so from where we were now walking.

Striking out of the wady, we climbed a steep hill on our left in hopes of getting some view of the land ahead of us. Outside the scope of our present tour this mysterious country yet lured us to seek a glimpse of it. Full of ruins that tell of a time of wonderful prosperity, it has been for centuries a land of unrest, where, because no man can look with any confidence to reap where he has

sown, Nature's bounty runs mostly to waste.

It was good to feel once more the exhilaration of mountain air, but the top of the hill, when gained, afforded us no view to eastward save of loftier heights. The view to westward was much more informing. It was easy to understand why the children of Reuben and Gad preferred a portion east of Jordan to the chances beyond the river. The steep, barren slopes of the Judean hills, apart from their arid and forbidding aspect, must, as a hostile region bristling with desperate and savage foes, have sorely tried the faith of the tribes either in the goodness of Canaan or their ability to subdue it. Nor is it easy to understand the strategy that caused the approach to Canaan to be undertaken by a route so unpromising. Of all the many historical invasions of the Holy Land there is no case but Joshua's of this route being selected. The Egyptians came in by Gaza, the Assyrians, Macedonians, and Romans all from the north, and even

the Arabs in the great invasions of Abu Bakr and Omar, though the holy city of Jerusalem was their principal objective, preferred pushing on east to Jordan and securing Damascus first, rather than attempt to force this formidable barrier of the Judean hills and gorges.

In the case of the Israelites there were probably special reasons for this peculiar line of advance. There is a hint in Numbers xxi. that they did actually first attempt the southern route, but got roughly handled by the Canaanites. One must also bear in mind that the reports of the spies, apart from those of Joshua and Caleb, were unfavourable to an attempt on the cities of the south. "We be not able to go up against the people, for they be stronger than we." The considerations that eventually decided the choice of the Jericho route were probably that the Canaanites on this side were weaker, more isolated, and less able to combine in their defence. The Israelites would overcome them in detail, and, gaining courage and

experience from their first victories, be in better mind afterwards to face their more powerful enemies in other parts of the Promised Land. Certainly the event fully justified the plan.

Returning to our camp, we soon after set out on our return journey, following a slightly different route. When we reached Jordan bridge we found it to be the scene of much animation and excitement. A number of Arabs had arrived with their camels and were standing about in groups shouting and gesticulating, and punctuating their remarks with many appeals to Allah. At the entrance to the bridge was a strong guard of British soldiers. On inquiry we learned that the following day was the date of a festival at Nebi Musa and that the Arabs were pilgrims to the tomb. As, however, there was at the time a particularly acute state of feeling between Arabs and Jews in Palestine, and some fear that the festival would be made the occasion of fanatical proceedings, the Chief Administrator had

stipulated that pilgrims from beyond Jordan should cloak their arms before crossing the river. *Hunc illæ lacrimæ.* We learned afterwards that in almost every case the pilgrims made a virtue of necessity and complied rather than abandon the pilgrimage.

After crossing the bridge we followed the route by the river side, and late in the afternoon reached the monastery of St. John the Baptist, an Orthodox foundation situated on a huge mound of marl near the spot where the saint is supposed to have baptized our Lord. An imposing white-walled structure with a handsome dome over the chapel, its condition inside was bare and miserable. Only three brothers remained in residence. They looked hungry and depressed, and were obviously living on what they had saved from the bounty of pilgrims before the war. The Turks had helped themselves to most of the furniture, but had committed no sacrilege. The chapel was featureless, having, like most

Greek churches, the walls and ceilings entirely covered with second-rate representations of apostles, saints, and scriptural subjects.

The place of the baptism, though by no means well authenticated, has been from early times much visited by eastern Christians. In the sixth century a Latin writer records that the banks were paved with marble. An annual pilgrimage to the spot is still organised yearly at Jerusalem by the Orthodox Church, but there is now no more than a wooden platform, and a plunge into the deep, swift current looks a risky proceeding.

There remained just daylight enough for us to complete our journey. The road now left the river, and the last three miles led us through a desert of salted marl to Dead Sea Post. It had been a long day, and we were glad enough when we once more stood by those dark blue waters.

So ended our visit to this mysterious region, and we left it with a sense that it had

yielded us none of its secrets. For, grim and repellent to the eye, Jordan Valley is wholly fascinating, and if the memory of it is not a horror for evermore you will, after one visit, inevitably return to learn more of its melancholy.

III
CARMEL

III

CARMEL

THE north-western corner of Palestine, comprising Carmel, the valley of the Kishon, and the strip of coast between the mountain and the sea, is a region apart, and uncharacteristic of the remainder. In summer Carmel is green and inviting when other hills are parched and desolate ; here only flourishes the homely, evergreen pine, and in spring the flowers are unique. Here the tribe of Asher dwelt in unheroic insularity. When Deborah rallied the tribes against Sisera, the Asherites stayed at home in their wadies, or watched unmoved from the mountain-top the progress of the battle by their own river, Kishon. They spread out round Acca and Tyre, dwelling among the Phœnicians and settling down in sight of cities

which they ought to have conquered, and there is no record of the tribe producing a single hero or taking any important part, at any time, in the drama of their nation's history. Here in after time the Crusaders made their first attempts on the Holy Land, and here they were able to hold out when all the rest were lost. And here, too, in more recent times, industrious and unobtrusive at first, the Germans began their peaceful penetration of the country. Their colony in Haifa flourished exceedingly, and from it they pushed out to Beit Lahm eastward, and founded Wilhelmina in the south, both model colonies.

After various rambles on the heights and in the gorges of Carmel, we decided on a three days' tour, that would take us into the very heart of the mountain. We should have to bivouac twice, but we started with rations only for the day. We fixed the sites of our two camps, one at Athlit on the coast and the other at Harosheth by the Kishon, and arranged that in each case a

car should arrive by road with our requirements for the night.

Leaving the camp on the hills above Haifa, we struck off on to a spur of the mountain where, over a grotto which pious belief claims to be the home of Elijah, stands the Carmelite monastery. It is modern (for the original was destroyed by the Turks for sheltering Napoleon's sick), but the position is splendid. From it one looks across the beautiful sand-girt bay to Acca, and on a clear day one sees the snow-covered peak of Hermon towering above the Syrian hills in solitary grandeur, and to the south the eye travels far down the hill-bound strip of coast past Athlit to the distant promontory of Cæsarea. It was spring, and masses of golden daisies were growing close up to the convent walls, while the stony track by which we descended to the shore was spangled all round with red anemones. Certainly, if he had any eye for natural beauty (and what hermit has not?) Elijah chose this spot out of all Carmel,

out of all Palestine, for the home where his spirit had rest.

Reaching the level of the plain, we pursued our way along the foot of the mountain by a camel-road leading through a rock-strewn wilderness. Half of what are called roads in Palestine are really mere paths which owe their existence to the broad hoof of the camel. Long strings of these animals, plodding each over the same track, have in the course of generations made these smooth hard tracks across the plains, which are ideal going for the pedestrian. Away to the right between us and the sea lay cultivated fields, on our left the terrain occasionally retreated up a gorge at the mouth of which showed whole fields of flowers, red, white, and yellow. As we advanced, trees began to shade our path, and we presently found ourselves in the midst of olive groves, arriving later at the village of El Tireh. Built entirely of white stone, filched from the ruins of previous cities, a distant view of the village was imposing, but on near

approach one finds the houses are mostly little better than hovels. The remains of a Benedictine monastery had as usual been incorporated with the present dwellings. The inhabitants of El Tireh have a thievish reputation. If it is so, small blame to them. The extortions of tax-farmers have long made life unlivable in country districts by honest means. The plain beneath El Tireh is, however, exceptionally fertile, and, if not forfeited to mortgagees, should bring prosperity to the village.

We lunched in a nook up the hill-side, looking out over El Tireh to the sea, now about a mile distant. A small lugger, running gently before the light northerly breeze, was the only sail in sight. An ugly mine had been washed up on the sands, but quite apart from such dangers the modern seed of Asher have a deep respect for deep waters.

As we were about to resume our walk, a car came spinning along the sands from

Haifa by the very margin of the sea, but became suddenly rutted in soft sand. From Haifa to Acca, the hard sand makes a splendid motor road, but, going south to Athlit, the sands get soft and treacherous. This car was obliged to return.

We now descended into the plain and followed a track leading through cultivation to join the main road running south to Sharon. Quite unmetalled and merely a track worn by traffic over the plain, this road is rough but quite practicable for motor traffic in dry weather. A low, rocky ridge divides the loam of the plain from the sand of the sea-shore. We followed the road till we reached the outskirts of a newly planned Jewish colony. Here a turning took us through the rocky ridge by a passage which the Crusaders had hewn. Immediately after we crossed in sight of the imposing ruins of Athlit.

Situated on a rocky headland, and protected by a marsh, this fortress, of which the ancient name is lost, was one of the strongest

places in Palestine. In reconstructing it the Crusaders found a large quantity of ancient coins, which they used to pay the expenses of the work. The walls were made immensely thick and strong, and, when all the rest of the Holy Land was lost, Petra Incisa (as they called it) still held out. Indeed the place, though besieged, was never taken, and the garrison departed at their leisure. Parts of the well and keep are still standing, and an immense amount of debris, in spite of constant pilfering of the stone, lies about everywhere. The stone is mostly limestone, cut from the mountain, but we also found a granite pillar, the last doubtless of a large number, which must have been brought from one of the Greek islands. Several underground chambers showed where non-combatants dwelt in safety in times of siege, and elaborate excavations had been made down beneath the sea to admit boats landing from the ships in the bay. The whole scheme of the place is magnificent,

and was evidently designed by men with big vision.

A car with our servants and provision for the night duly arrived about sundown and we bivouacked on the farther side of the bay, south of Athlit close to the sea and well away from the marsh. From this aspect you see the best-preserved section of the fortress and in the last rays of the setting sun it was all one enchanted city. All too soon the shadows gathered and presently the prolonged wail of a jackal announced the arrival of night.

As Athlit was largely used in the Middle Ages as a landing place for pilgrims and a pilgrim route led across Carmel to Nazareth, we expected to find a well-defined path for the next stage of our journey. At first this was so, and we were admitted by an easy ascent through a gorge up into the mountain region, where we came on a small village. No sooner, however, were we past the village than our way led on to a ridge where the path was so beset with loose stones that, to

walk without stumbling, it was necessary to keep our eyes constantly on the ground. A pilgrim journey being designedly an act of penance, it is easy to understand that no effort should formerly have been made to improve the route, but the incredible thing is that the local sheiks who rule the present villages should, generation after generation, put up with a nuisance that a few weeks of industry could entirely remove.

Meanwhile the scenery, when we found time to admire it, was entirely pleasing, the fresh greenery of spring alternating everywhere with the obtrusive limestone. Here, too, the red anemone prevailed, but in the valleys whole acres were bright with the white or golden daisy. Away down to the right a sluggish stream meandered seawards through surroundings that would have graced a poet's home.

Poets are not common in Palestine. Indeed, there are few who dare risk seclusion in any rural solitude. Nevertheless, we

were now in touch with quite respectable literary association. Presently our track dipped into a wady, where we found our brook had twisted to meet us. Crossing it and ascending the opposite hill-side, we came in sight of the Druse village of Dalieh, where Laurence Oliphant had built himself a house and for some time lived. Having endeared himself to the inhabitants by ransoming the son of the sheik from military service, he had been rewarded with a beautiful site on a hill-slope among fig and pomegranate trees and clustering vines, where he had built a little red-roofed villa which now presented itself to our view. In digging his foundations, he had found various interesting objects that testified to previous occupation, including an immense stone roller, once used as an olive press. The situation was certainly very charming, and an ideal retreat for literary pursuit.

The Druses of Dalieh, Esfia, and one or two other Carmel villages are colonists

whose immigration dates from the seventeenth century, when the national hero—the Emir Fakr Eddin—led the tribes on a career of conquest. Druses are fond of mountains, probably for the sake of the isolation they enjoy there; but these Druses are considered by others as a contemptible lot for remaining under the Turkish dominion. The noblest of them returned long ago to their independence in the Hauran.

Nevertheless, as we passed through the village we observed that its condition was that of a self-respecting people, and that the good looks of its women were of the healthy and not the morbid variety so noticeable among the fellahs.

Leaving Dalieh, where the country was full of plantations, tame and rural, and where none of the hills rose above 1,000 feet, we now began to make our way towards the main ridge of the mountain. Cultivation was soon left behind, and we proceeded along the side of a narrow gorge going north-

eastward which led us into the very heart of Carmel. The sides of the gorge became higher and steeper as we advanced, but presently it debouched into a broad valley that crossed it at right angles. The bottom of the valley was green with cultivation, and on the slopes actually cattle (a further sign of the Druse superiority), instead of the everlasting goat, were peacefully browsing. The contrast between the pleasant pasturage of this valley and the wild and craggy steeps on either side was very remarkable.

The gorge by which we had reached the valley continued its way the other side and would doubtless have led us directly to the high-perched village of Esfia and thence quickly to our bivouac for the night. We had, however, still the best part of the day before us, and struck off to the right to visit the reputed scene of Elijah's ordeal with the prophets.

The valley itself was our shortest route, but an attractive path tempted us into

the hills on our right, where we made our way along a series of sometime cultivated terraces. This region abounded with white and golden daisies, and we came now and then on delightful glades where with rock, tree, and flowers, and luxuriant verdure, Nature had wrought some of her rarest handiwork.

An hour's ramble brought us in sight of a convent perched on the southern end of the main ridge of Carmel at a spot called El Muhraka, "the place of the burning," which tradition has appointed as the place of Elijah's sacrifice. It is, however, quite plain, from the narrative of 1 Kings xviii., that this site is most improbable. Water, used so lavishly by Elijah to saturate his altar, would certainly not have been available on the top of this barren ridge.

Our track now began to take us down to the valley at a point where it debouched into another and wider valley which crossed it, running north-east and south-west. Half-

way down we came upon several piles of stones, and among them the remains of just such an altar as is described in 1 Kings xviii. 31-2 with a trench about it. Laurence Oliphant also noticed the place, and remarks that though this particular altar was probably constructed in recent times for commemorative purposes, the spot is much more likely to be the scene of the original sacrifice, there being plenty of water in the neighbourhood. If this is so, then Elijah had three miles of a very rough track over which to march the 400 prophets of Baal to their death by the Kishon. To us this seemed a most incredible and unnecessary proceeding. For, when he had reached the Kishon, he would certainly have found it dry in a year of drought so far from its mouth. Surely it is much more probable that the whole scene was enacted near the Kishon itself at some point nearer the sea where it sweeps round the roots of the mountain and where, even in time of drought, it would be still a fairly bountiful

stream affording plenty of water for Elijah's purposes and deep enough to drown his victims.

Anyhow, the scenery round here was the most romantic and suggestive in Carmel, and it was with great regret that we descended to the valley. A small village lay at the junction of the two valleys, and, as we left this behind, we saw it was now but a short distance out into the plain. Our track finally brought us out into the road which connects Haifa with Jenin and all the country to the south. Doubtless it was by this road that Ahab returned to Jezreel, and his haste was quite intelligible, for two hours' downpour on this road would have rendered it quite impossible for his chariot.

We ourselves took the opposite direction. On our left the precipitous flank of Carmel, away to our right stretched the great plain of Esdra-elon. Ahead of us a range of grey hills trailed away to the east. The land about us was green with waving corn and

beyond it, round the foot of the mountain, were meadows, lush with grass and flowers like an English May.

An hour's walking brought us to the Kishon, now a sluggish, winding stream some twelve feet across. The road passed it by a ford, which the previous September, just before the fall of Haifa, we had found dry. Now a car would have sunk to its axles in the water. As it was we crossed by a small footbridge. Another twenty minutes brought us to the junction with the Nazareth road where the car with our stores had already arrived.

We encamped on top of a big mound reputed to be the site of "Harosheth of the Gentiles," the home of Sisera and doubtless one of those strongholds of the Canaanites which the children of Asher had suffered to remain in their possession.

The choicest part of our tour now lay before us, namely, the walk along the top of the main ridge of Carmel back to camp, and we were up betimes so as not to miss

the beauty of a spring morning. A low mist hung above the plain as we made our way to the mountain, and the meadow land we were treading was drenched with dew. We could see no path or any sort of track up the deep slopes in front of us, and realised that this was another instance of Druse isolation. There up above us was the flourishing village of Esfia, behind us were the main roads to Nazareth and Jenin, and yet not a sign of any direct communication.

It was of no moment to us, however, as with no load but our lunch and our water-bottles we thoroughly enjoyed our scramble through the wild. At one point a sheer face of rock barred our progress, and it was some time before we found a place where with the aid of straggling roots, it was possible to make the ascent. Above it we came on a thick belt of oleander and other shrubs and undergrowth, which presented equal difficulty, but this too we forced at last and arrived at length at

a shepherds' path which led us round into the head of a gorge. There we were amid lovely scenery, passing dells where anemones, white, red, and blue (a combination seen only in Carmel) conspired in a pageant of beauty. Cultivation next appeared, and very soon upon our right we espied, perched on a spur of the mountain, the recondite village of Esfia.

The position of Esfia, surrounded as it is by deep-lying bosoms of olive groves and other vegetation, is magnificent, and here it was that Laurence Oliphant first proposed to make his home. The Druse proprietors of the land, however, opened their mouths too wide, and he departed in disgust.

We made our way through the village, which had a well-swept appearance, to the head of the spur, and enjoyed a magnificent view. The peak of Hermon showed up like a huge loaf of sugar above the Galilean hills and the whole plain of Esdra-elon lay at our feet stretching away to where it

sloped off into the mists of the Jordan Valley.

Returning, we commenced our walk along the main ridge towards Haifa. A faint breeze from the north just circulated the fresh mountain air and wafted to us in successive waves the delicious scent of the broom, which now grew in profusion on all sides of us. Our path was well worn and clear of stone, and we swung along in an ecstasy of enjoyment.

Just ahead of us, now, was the highest peak or rather hump of the mountain, and the hump was thick with gorse and broom. The ascent was easy, and we came presently to trenches. Here a body of Turkish troops had held the mountain road to Haifa and commanded with their guns the one in the plain below. The position had, however, been easily outflanked and abandoned without serious resistance.

The remainder of our walk, though intensely enjoyable, calls for little description.

At first the ridge narrowed, and while on our right the drop into the plain was always sheer and steep, on our left it sloped away gently to lower levels and pleasant valleys. Then, as we approached the northern end of the ridge, it widened out again into a plateau where General Headquarters were encamped. This plateau had evidently once been covered with pine-woods, but the greater part had been cut down by the Turks for fuel.

Three hours after we left the top of the mountain we were walking along a terrace that overlooks the town of Haifa and across that magnificent bay destined at an early date to be full of wharves and quays for the commerce of regenerate Palestine. Half-way along this fine terrace was a pillar bearing the legend "Wilhelmus Rex et Imperator," erected there by German colonists in honour of the Kaiser's visit. There, doubtless under the pines, Wilhelmus had stood looking out on that fine

prospect and dreaming wonderful dreams. Fortunately for mankind, the dreams had now already come to nothing, and a few days later, by the orders of a corporal of engineers engaged in blasting rock, this pillar, too, was splintered to the wide !

IV

TIBERIAS

IV

TIBERIAS

FROM the Mediterranean to the Sea of Galilee, from the modern town of Haifa to the ancient city of Tiberias, through Nazareth and past Armageddon, avoiding main roads and seeking ever the least trodden paths, this was now the task we set ourselves. We had explored to our hearts' content the excellency of Carmel, and our feet had recovered from rough treatment of its stony tracks. A wider field now called us and a deeper curiosity impelled us. We were going to visit scenes charmed for ever by the memory of the Walker whose tours had been fraught with such tremendous purpose for mankind.

We were warned, of course, that we were doing a very rash thing: we were told that

the country was full of fanatical Arabs who would fall on us by night and visit on us the vengeance of Islam, and we were frightened with tales of lonely officers who had, as a fact, been "scuppered" in lonely places. We were resolved, however; so, selecting a minimum of necessary kit and a maximum of suitable stores, we hired a couple of good donkeys and a *mukari* to drive them, attached an Arab servant of tried fidelity (and a passable knowledge of cooking), and, armed with rifle and a revolver, started out on our travels.

It was late April and just the usual season for rain. It had, in fact, been dry for about six weeks, and rains which had been hoped for earlier had now ceased to be expected. The morning of our start was dull and lowering, but rain had so often threatened and failed to fall that we ignored the omen and merely congratulated ourselves on the cool weather we should experience.

Having rejected as stale and traffic-ridden the main road which runs south of

the Kishon, and out on to the plain of Esdra-elon, we crossed the Kishon over a bridge near its mouth as if to proceed by the beautiful hard sands that provide the road to Acca. But Acca is in Syria; for the Jew who lives there, when he feels his end approaching, has himself carried out of the gates and over the frontier to die. We ourselves had no intention to cross the boundaries of the Holy Land, and so, turning our backs on the coast, we pushed straight away into the interior. Labouring first through a belt of sand-dunes, we emerged at length into a stretch of cultivated plain, coming soon to a large mud-built zareba, or quadrangle of huts so arranged that a small population may defend its homes from the Bedouin raider, we passed on into the foot-hills and then through a pleasant valley thickly grown with olive-trees to the little town of Shef Amr.

As usual with Palestine villages, the first sight of Shef Amr was impressive and alluring. A fine castle seemed to crown

the hill-top and the houses that clustered round were of stone and not of mud. We had to call on the military governor, and we pictured ourselves being received in a fine old mediæval hall. But, alas, the usual disillusionment ! Our fine castle was only an old tower used as headquarters for the local gendarmerie, and the whole place proved, on closer acquaintance, though cleaner than most, to be paltry and ruinous. The inhabitants, however, seemed pleased to see us ; half a dozen volunteered to conduct us to the Serai, or governor's house, and more than one offered us his own hospitality. We had no intention, however, of accepting even that of the governor, so, after a brief visit at his house, and promising to make a longer one on our return, we said *au revoir* and set out on the Nazareth road.

We were soon traversing a pleasant moorland region, which, viewed under this lowering sky, looked almost like a bit of Scotland. True, the scrub-like verdure around us was

a poor substitute for Scottish heather, but a generous sprinkling of the gladiolus, a common flower in Northern Palestine, gave the necessary touch of colour to the landscape. For the rest, neither lake nor stream refreshed the valleys, but with a cool bracing breeze beating about us we swung along, enjoying the full charm of this spring-touched wilderness. Yes, wilderness it was, without a farm, a home-stead, or a wayside inn to catch the eye, and not even the trace of a Bedouin encampment. Presently it began to improve, and suddenly, as we gained a hill-top and looked down into the next valley, we saw that the road ran over a bridge and that under the bridge flowed a real river. Tea-time was clearly indicated, and in a few moments we were unloaded, our kettle was boiling over a cheerful blaze, and our donkeys were wading in the cool waters.

When we resumed our march heavy clouds were beating up from the west, and the air had become quite chilly. Rain, however,

still held off, and we refused to believe it was coming. Nazareth was still a far cry, and in any case we were determined to bivouac. As evening fell our road led us up a rich valley full of orchards and gardens. The rich red pomegranate flower now added colour to the scenery and a faint scent of orange-blossom perfumed the air, while a little babbling stream irrigated all this luxuriant verdure. Into what oriental paradise had we strayed ? Alas, it was only the outskirts of a German colony !

We traced the brook to its source, and, in order to be near water, decided to go no farther but to bivouac without delay. We chose, therefore, a sheltered spot on the hill-side and made our dispositions for the night. "Besir sheta," warned one of the *mukaris*, glancing up at the still blackening sky. "La," rejoined our Arab servant, whose tongue was faithful to the mind of his masters. The dinner cooked at our camp fire was delicious, and presently, rolled up in our warm valises, we smoked

the final pipe of the day. But hardly had we closed our eyes when a keen blast blew and down came the rain. Gentle at first, it steadily increased in volume. There was nothing for it but to lie still and hope it would pass, but the wind was now blowing a gale, and evidently we were not to be spared. Thoroughly tired and confident in my waterproof covering, I slept half-way through the night, but in the small hours woke to find my feet in a puddle of water. Some traitorous rift in my waterproof armour had let in the enemy ! After that all hope of comfort was over, and the moans of my companions showed their plight was as bad. Wetter and wetter we became. Seekers of holiday delight, we had encountered, our very first day, one of the worst experiences of active service.

Soon after dawn there was a break in the downpour, and, exploring the neighbourhood, we were fortunate enough to find a derelict stone hut with half a roof on it, where we soon had a cheerful blaze going,

and a warm breakfast quickly put a brighter complexion on our fortunes. Presently three natives strayed in for shelter. We offered them cigarettes, and they were soon seated by our fire engaged in animated conversation with our Arab servant. They turned out to be Turkish soldiers who had succeeded in finding a refuge from their country's disasters in a neighbouring village. They were stout fellows, however, and bore us no grudge. They were without the sensitiveness of the Arab and gave us their views of military life with an air of *bonhomie* and good-humour that one does not often notice in our more staid allies.

As soon as the weather improved and we were able to give a thought to our whereabouts we made the discovery that we were standing on historic ground. The spring by which we had encamped was none other than the "fountain of Seffurieh," where, so the chroniclers tell us, Guy of Lusignan, King of Jerusalem, rallied his forces for the last "great battle with Saladin. Thither

had come Raymond of Tripoli, Raynald of Kerak, and great contingents of Hospitallers and Templars to defend the Cross. Here, where there was plenty of water, Raymond had advised they should await the approach of the enemy; but Guy, won over to bolder counsels, had left this secure position to go in search of the enemy. Result, the battle of Hattin, where the Crusaders, having to fight the agonies of thirst as well as a powerful enemy, covered themselves with glory, but were disastrously beaten. In fact ever since, for 800 years, Jerusalem has suffered under Moslem rule, and it was only yesterday the defeat was avenged.

Resuming our journey, we decided to make straight for Nazareth and spend the night there in order to air our damp kit and replace our perished stores. Nazareth lies on the inner slopes of an amphitheatre of hills, and faces south. To reach it we had now to surmount the steep slopes on the northern side. The sun came out and, as we ascended, breezes laden with the scents

of refreshed nature beat about us and cheered our spirits for the climb. So steep was the hill-side that the road zigzagged from terrace to terrace. As we looked back our gaze soon topped the hills to the north and presently we perceived in the far north-east the snowy peak of Hermon towering above everything near it. By midday we were over the ridge and swinging down into Nazareth.

Built on these irregular hill slopes, Nazareth abounds in fine sites, the best of which have been occupied by picturesque religious houses of various nations and creeds. There is nothing really authentic to visit, but, as you wander up the winding streets, there is much to interest the eye, and many of the convents, nestling in gardens full of cypress-trees, look very pleasant homes. There is an atmosphere of peace and quiet about it all that is well in keeping with its sacred associations. The population is mostly Christian, but includes a strong Arab element. The hotel to which

we were directed turned out to be an Arab one. All the bedrooms contained four beds, being intended for the accommodation of Moslem gentlemen accompanied by the statutory number of wives, and in fact such a family was among the guests. Our various wants were, however, willingly attended to, and we were not sorry, after our experiences of the night before, to sleep between sheets and under a solid roof.

Next morning the rain was over and we set off eastward in good fettle. Our first objective of the day was Mount Tabor and the way led through pleasant moorland still fresh with yesterday's rain. At one place a brook came babbling down the valley in full spate, and we paused to enjoy the unusual spectacle. What reservoirs it might fill, what orchards it might irrigate, what herds it might water ! But it passed through a wilderness yielding its sweetness only to the passing traveller and lost itself no doubt presently in the thirsty plain of Esdra-elon.

Our path now degenerated to a mere

track which was sometimes difficult to pick out over the rocky ground. A party of peasants passed us taking their village-made wares to the Nazareth market, but otherwise we were always alone. Presently, as we wound round the side of a hill, the great mass of Tabor came into view, rising like a camel's hump out of the plain. By 11 o'clock we were ascending its precipitous slopes by a broad path that rose from terrace to terrace, winding by easy stages to the top.

Two convents, one a Latin the other a Greek, crown the heights of Tabor, having been built there in the pious belief that Tabor is the Mount of Transfiguration. Unfortunately the practical certainty that at the time of our Lord the summit of the mountain was occupied by a flourishing village entirely destroys the theory. In reality the ancient traditions of Tabor are military rather than spiritual, the place having been an important fortress during the later Jewish era.

Nevertheless, it was now a good site for a convent, and we made for the one on the highest ground, finding it embowered in trees. Remembering the hospitality of Beit Gemal, we hoped for that of the good brothers here also. To our disappointment all the monks were absent. We were readily admitted, however, by the old woman who seemed to have been left in charge, to the roof of the chapel, and the view from this coign of vantage was certainly reward enough for our arduous climb. Beneath us, seemingly flat as a billiard-board and shaped rather like one, lay the great plain of Esdra-elon, and round it, rising up each from its own base, were the famous mountains of Carmel and the "little hill of Hermon." Away to the south the peaks of Ebal and Gerizim stood out conspicuous above their neighbours. To the east a break in the landscape revealed where lay the sea of Tiberias, sunk, however, too deep in its bed to be visible. Beyond the likewise hidden Jordan a mist prevailed,

and only a faint outline was visible of the sentinel hills that guard the approach to the goodness of Gilead.

From more distant scenes we dropped our gaze on to a small village lying at the foot of Tabor. This village was, perhaps, the site of the fabled Armageddon. And what a site for a battle-field ! Westward to Nazareth and beyond, rising abruptly out of the plain, was the unbroken range of moorland by which we had come. No finer position could be imagined for the entrenchment of a great army. One could picture the Jews swarming in their thousands across the plains to their last great battle with the Gentiles, and the surging wave of their assault broken on this impregnable barrier.

To our disappointment there was no way down the eastern slopes of Tabor, and in order to continue our journey it was necessary to regain the plain by the route by which we had ascended. Our *mukaris* were very indignant over this.

They had imagined we should spend a night at the monastery, and had promised themselves an easy time. That we should ascend the Tabor out of sheer curiosity, and, after this piece of tiresome folly, should come down the same day and march all the afternoon was to their minds nothing short of lunacy. A good hour's halt for lunch, however, and a contribution to their meal from our own stores put them in a good temper, and we moved forward again in cheerful anticipation of the new scenes in front of us.

Our path, for it was no more, lay across a green, fertile, cultivated plain, and the scenery became monotonous. But the easy going suited our Arab followers, who beguiled the way with their quaint wailing, chromatic chants. Crops, too, were growing in the fields about us, and in the distance we could see more than one village of red-bricked, neatly-roofed cottages, among cypress-trees—sure signs of those colonies that for the last forty years have sprung

up to herald the new era of a repatriated Jewry. About two hours' walking brought us to one of these, but the interior was disappointing. What from a distance had appeared so neat and smiling proved, on closer acquaintance, to be a collection of untidy and ill-kept habitations. Not the slightest attempt had been made to give these cottages a pleasant and homely appearance. No gardens, no flowers nor creepers, any amount of dirt lying about, the place seemed to be the abode of a depressed, poor-spirited folk who had quite failed to make use of their opportunity. Nor did the appearance of the cottagers alter the impression. A pale, weakly looking lot, we placed them as emigrants from the slums of some continental city where the struggle to live had for generations dulled their senses to the joys of sweetness and light, who had been dumped down in this country home without an idea of how to make the best of it. We had seen flourishing colonies, but this one was evidently

so far a failure. Fortunately we wanted nothing from them but water, and this we drew from the admirably built fountain which supplied the colony.

Finding no temptation to linger, we resumed our journey and passed on through a sometime cultivated but now neglected region, a flat, treeless plain without the slightest feature of interest. A few miles on we noticed the land had been almost completely reclaimed by nature, and a lovely blue flower of the delphinium family (the lily of the parable) now began to brighten the landscape. Presently we went by a deserted village, and the ground sloped away toward a broad valley. We pushed eagerly forward, hoping every moment to catch a glimpse of Galilee, but soon discovered that there was yet a high range of upland between us and our destination. In the valley we came upon the prosperous-looking colony of Sarona, but leaving it on our right pressed forward through the well-tilled fields. A gendarme pointed out to us the

nearest way to Tiberias, and we set about our final climb.

We were beginning by now to feel really tired, and felt rather angry about this climb. Knowing that the Sea of Galilee was about 100 feet below the level of the Mediterranean, we had every reason to expect that the final stage of our journey would be an easy one. Far from this, here we were doing one of the stiffest ascents of the day. Daylight was now failing, and by the time we had reached the top of the long slope it was so dark that the view was entirely obscured. The path now led along the top of a plateau, and Tiberias seemed as far off as ever. At last the full moon rose above the mountains of Gilead and suddenly far down to the right of us we had a vision of the lake, beautiful and mysterious, with a patch of light glimmering away to the south-eastern shore. View there was none, for the shores of the lake were wrapped in mist—nothing but the silvery gleam of these deep-lying waters.

It was strangely beautiful, this first glimpse of Galilee, and the memory of it is a joy for ever. At the same time we realised, with some misgiving, that we were hundreds of feet above the lake, and that the descent by moonlight was likely to be steep and precipitous. Presently an array of lights below gave us cheer, and we knew it could only be Tiberias. Very soon we were groping our way down the steep rough track, and we expected every moment one of our tired donkeys would come to grief. Marvellous beasts, they accomplished their difficult task without the slightest mishap, and this after a tramp of at least twenty miles that day.

It was past eight o'clock at night when we entered the little city by the lake, but almost immediately we found ourselves outside the hotel. "Yes, just one room left," said our German hostess in reply to our anxious inquiry, and we were just in time also for an excellent dinner. After that to a comfortable night's rest, feeling that all was very right with the world.

The following day we decided should be spent at Tiberias, and we had not to go farther than the verandah of our hotel for a view of our surroundings. There was nothing very entrancing in the daylight view of the lake; but a lake is always delightful, and in this case the chief delight lay in actually looking on a scene that, so far, had been only dimly pictured. Tiberias itself is an ugly little town without any character, inhabited mostly by Russian Jews of an exceptionally low type, and we looked in vain for anything to give tone to the picture. We soon made up our minds that a trip on the lake would give better results, and inquired for a boat. By the aid of three intermediaries we succeeded at length in our quest, and were soon afloat in a small fishing craft bound for Capernaum.

Once well away from the shore we realised how low in its bed the lake lies. Surrounded by steep sides, it is like a cup from which the wine has been already deeply quaffed. On the western side a narrow bit of shore divided

the water from the hills. On the eastern side the cliffs seemed to be washed by the water, but were broken here and there by deep gorges. It is down these gorges that the squalls come which make the lake so dangerous to the sailor.

This morning there was little wind as yet ; the sails flapped, and the boat had to be rowed. Presently the hills on the western shore ceased abruptly and a valley of green-sward stretched away as far as the eye could see. On the higher ground stood a trim little colony. A slight breeze sprang up and sped us on our way. The top end of the lake now came into view, flat near the shore, but backed by successive ranges of hills. At length, after a two hours' journey, we ran into a shady bit of shore, and this was Capernaum.

A walled enclosure containing the ruins of the synagogue recently excavated by German archæologists was the only sign of habitation, and to this we made our way. A German monk received us and

gladly showed us the results of his work. The whole floor of the synagogue had been laid bare, and enough of the walls was standing to indicate the plan of the building, while a number of broken columns, some beautifully carved, revealed the character of the architecture. These dignified remains spoke of a time when the Jews loved to beautify their places of worship, and one can only hope that the habit will revive, for at present the synagogue is invariably the ugliest building in the village.

We liked Capernaum, and lingered there wistfully. A green hill-side, these ruins, a thicket or two, and a row of trees by the side of the lake—that's all there was, and yet there was a feeling that a great spirit had brooded here and found refreshment by these lapping waters from the hours of travail. Had it been a crowded village we should have missed this feeling. We rejoiced in its deserted site.

After a refreshing plunge in the lake we took to our boat again and started on our

return journey. A fine breeze was now blowing, and we sailed back the whole distance to Tiberias, a delightful run. Making our way to the hotel, we found in the street a crowd of Arabs, and learned that a wedding was in progress. A row of young men were swaying their bodies forward together and extending their hands in front of them as if to pull on a net, chanting at the same time over and over again ceaselessly a single refrain in their favourite minor key, while a choragus with a big stick shouted and gesticulated and kept them at it. Arabs in groups of three with their arms round each others' necks were pacing it to and fro in a quaint kind of dance, while the bridegroom sat silent and motionless on a horse unnoticed by anyone. Whether he was intensely bored, or whether a great emotion was passing over his soul, it was impossible to tell from his pale, melancholy face. Probably the latter, for repetitions of sound or gesture which to us would be exasperating exercise on the eastern mind a sort of mystic

exaltation, which is only intensified by their continuance.

We repaired to the hotel for tea, and came out hoping by now to see the bride ; but no, exactly the same ritual was in progress, being pursued, in fact, with greater zest than before. Despairing of any interesting development, we struck out of the town to visit the famous sulphur baths of Tiberias. There was little enough to see, but, after visiting these and similar springs round the Dead Sea, one could not but reflect how much there was in these symptoms of their contiguity to the bowels of the earth to suggest to the Jews the idea of Hell. From the time of Herod, however, to our own day men have lost sight of any such superstition in an appreciation of the medical value of these boiling springs, and no doubt Tiberias will early become a famous Spa.

Our time was now up in Tiberias. We were strongly tempted that night at the hotel by an offer of seats in a motor going to

Damascus, but were true to our plans of walking back, and next morning found us on trek once more. We had chosen a more northerly route for our return journey, and the first mile or two took us along the main road, which we had so far avoided. We toiled up the hill, took a long farewell look at Galilee, then followed the road along the plateau that now lay before us. We were now on the battle-field of Hattin, a stretch of level upland about a mile broad from which the ground fell away rather abruptly on our right into the plain of El Buttauf. It was smooth, open ground, and the chivalry of Christendom must have had every chance. At the village of Lubieh, to which we presently came, had been fought out the final and fiercest stage of the battle. There was no water in Lubieh, but it is difficult to understand why thirst should have played such an important part in the decision, for at Kefr Kenna (reputed to be Cana of the wedding feast), not four miles away, there is a spring almost as bountiful

as that of Seffurieh, and it should have been quite easy to supply the army from it.

Soon after Lubieh we left the road by a camel-track that led us through a barren and stony, but pleasant and undulating country, to Toran, another waterless village, but surrounded by olive groves and other cultivation. From there the path took us along the foot of a series of rocky hills. In a green valley not far from Kefr Kenna, we decided to make our bivouac for the night. Fetching a supply of water from the spring at Kefr Kenna, we settled down in a bed of long lush grass in full confidence that the weather would not again betray us.

The night was in fact still and beautiful, and I was awakened in the small hours by the passing of a caravan. The moonlight, the long string of stately-stepping camels and the flowing white burnouses of the Arabs made an arresting picture ; but the lilt of a rich young voice ringing out in the still night air and voicing who knows what

praises of Allah or his mistress enchanted all. It was just one of those rare glimpses of the romance of eastern life, the sort of incident that works on the fancy and lingers in the memory of a man in after days till he hears that Call of the East that would lure him from his western home, to dwell with Meshech and in Kedar's tents.

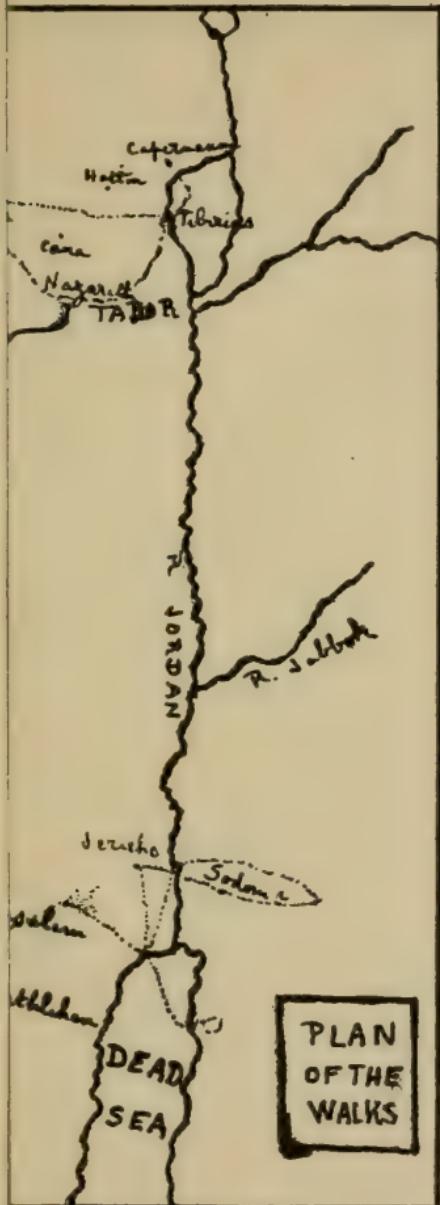
When we woke next morning we felt the romance of our journey was now over. All that remained of it was a stretch of some sixteen miles to the coast, part of which we had already traversed in the first stage of our tour. We were hospitably entertained at Shef Amr by the Governor, a prepossessing young Syrian who had done much to improve the condition of the town. His servants vied with each other to do us honour, and it was a most agreeable ending to our tour.

We had seen the land and we loved it. We had seen it not as those who career through it in a car and miss all the choicest messages of Nature. We had toiled in it,

slept on it, suffered in it, and been rewarded with a full tale of its charms.

“ So to the land our hearts we give
Until sure magic strike.”

There will soon be many changes. Many solitudes will be re-peopled, and much that is picturesque will vanish ; but as yet the Holy Land is a good place to wander in.





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